# The Impact of News "Voice" on Adolescent Political Efficacy

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Paper presented to the Mass Communication and Society Division of Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August, 2009

This study was part of a five-University partnership to research parents and adolescents during the 2008 Presidential election and beyond. We thank our partners at the Universities of Wisconsin, Kansas, Arkansas and Texas.

## Abstract

In a national survey of teens and their parents fielded in the months immediately following the 2008 Presidential election, we examined the role of a new news concept, "voice," which we operationalized in terms of three categories: authoritative, opinionated, and direct to the consumer (DTC). Given both the shunning of traditional news media by the young and the rapid growth of new news options like parody news television (e.g., Daily Show), blogs, candidate internet sites, and social networks, we hypothesized that the way news was "spoken" would have a major impact on the young. Looking at political knowledge and political efficacy, we found that opinionated and DTC voices mediated the effects of general newspaper and Internet use on efficacy. These findings support the central significance of the "voice" component of the Media Choice Model (Thorson & Duffy, 2006) and an innovative model conceptualizing the impact of media on adolescents' political efficacy.

## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the impact of the style in which news is communicated, a dimension that we call "voice." We suggest voice is critically important to the process by which young teens acquired political knowledge and exhibit political efficacy in last fall's Presidential election. To provide the rationale for the approach, we integrate a number of literature areas under the explanatory context of the Media Choice Model (Thorson & Duffy, 2006), an extensive elaboration of the uses and gratifications approach. Although the central focus of the model is how the impact of that media use is mediated through people's motivations for using the media, it also posits that "voice" is a crucial filter for these processes. As background, we look at what is known about the following influences on political socialization: exposure to television, print, and internet news, and whether that information occurs in the context of classic news "authoritative" voice, opinionated voice like that in blogs or opinionated news like Fox News Channel, or directly from the politicians themselves, a voice we call "direct to the consumer," a phrase borrowed from the advertising literature. We also examine what is known about the relationship between political knowledge and efficacy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Self-efficacy and media use*

The notion of self-efficacy, defined as the belief that one can effectively act on knowledge or beliefs in the performance of a given task, has its roots in Bandura's (1986) seminal work on social cognitive theory. Bandura said that efficacy was a main factor in determining how an individual would behave based on the acquisition of knowledge, because it is a critical part of a person's own sense of motivation to choose. An individual with high efficacy would feel empowered to apply knowledge in a way that creates action, whereas a low-efficacy individual would typically feel helpless or lost on the given task. Knowledge is a component in efficacy and a high predictor of efficacy, but it is not the sole component in its creation.

Bandura (1997) found that the truth or falsity of knowledge was not so important compared to how an individual feels about the knowledge. In that sense, self-efficacy is a step past knowledge, where an individual takes information and analyzes it to come to a conclusion about how they think about the information. Self-efficacy judgments primarily come from experience about a person's own accomplishments performing the task in the past, observations of others performing the task, persuasion that happens as a result of others, and a person's emotional or physiological state (Bandura, 1997; Staples, Hulland, & Higgin, 1998).

The notion of self-efficacy has been applied across several disciplines. In terms of political communication, research has focused on how information consumers absorb knowledge in a way that leads them to believe they can cause change by becoming politically engaged. Information and knowledge are necessary steps toward increasing this sense of efficacy, and thus news media play a vital role (Pateman, 1970). Scholars have differentiated between "internal

efficacy," which refers to a person's beliefs about their ability to understand and participate in political action, and "external efficacy," which focuses on whether an individual believes a person's individual or collective political activity truly can change the way politicians and government officials behave (Balch, 1974; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991).

Communication researchers have tied social cognitive theory to uses and gratifications theory in an effort to show media effects on self-efficacy. Media exposure influences decisions about self-efficacy because individuals reevaluate expectations about likely outcomes based on knowledge acquired (LaRose, Mastro & Eastin, 2001). Some media, such as the Internet, have been found to increase internal efficacy because the medium provides wide-ranging access to information about politics, candidates, and important issues in public life (Johnson & Kaye, 2003). The ability to deliberate and exchange ideas through media have been found to be drivers of higher self-efficacy because it increases knowledge an individual has about others' lives external to the self (Meraz, 2006). Reliance on a particular form of media increases the impact that use of that media has on a user's self-efficacy (Miller & Reese, 1982).

As a smaller subset of media use, the use of news media creates ties between people and fosters attitudes of democratic efficacy by allowing others to learn about and empathize with their fellow citizens through the acquisition of knowledge (Curran, 2006). Thorson (2006) noted that news mobilizes civic attitudes by keeping citizens informed about what is going on in their communities and, ideally, providing solutions or areas of action that provide ways in which consumers can act upon the information. Thorson also noted that news use is positively associated with both internal and external efficacy and thus helps to promote prosocial behaviors in communities. Others have found that political self-efficacy plays a critical role for younger users when it comes to civic behaviors such as voting (Kaid, McKinney & Tedesco, 2007).

*Adolescents and news use: A uses and gratifications framework*

Many studies of media use employ uses and gratification theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), an audience-based approach to mass communication theory that understands media use from the perspective that people have specific psychological, social, and information gratifications that they fulfill by using the media that best suit their purposes.

As Katz (1959) pointed out, beyond basic physiological needs for survival, people have communication needs. Humans choose the communication act that best gratifies that need. The communication behavior may occur face to face or it may be mediated with a communication medium (newspapers, radio, television, iPods, and so on). As new media are introduced into their environment, humans will pick and choose among the alternatives, tending to head toward that communication act that maximally satisfies their particular need.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) suggested that uses and gratifications research should focus on a handful of central concepts: a) the social and psychological origins of b) needs that generate c) expectations of d) the mass media or other communication sources, which lead to e) different media choices, resulting in f) gratification of the needs. Rosengren (1974) added two important additional aspects of the process, g) individual differences like demographics and lifestyles, and h) particular situations in which the needs must be filled. Unlike many competing

theories of media use, this approach assumes that media users are active, picking and choosing so as to maximize desired gratifications.

The uses and gratifications approach has led to development of several taxonomies of communication needs. Excellent summaries of the large literature on communication need articulation can be found in Rubin (1983; 1994) and in Ruggiero (2000). This theory has been applied to aid understanding antecedents of choice of every medium, including newspapers (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987); television (Babrow, 1987; Conway & Rubin, 1991), and the newer media such as cable television (Heeter & Greenberg, 1985); E-mail (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000), and most recently the Internet (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Papcharissi & Rubin, 2000; Rodgers & Thorson, 2001).

Uses and gratifications theory has also been used in models that attempt to identify how people choose one medium over another. A good example is Lacy (2000), who suggested that five communication needs (surveillance, diversion, social-cultural interaction, decision making, and self understanding) combine with other variables like quality of news and media features (such as cost) to determine how much time people will spend with various media.

Eveland (2004) developed a useful uses and gratifications-based approach to understanding how people use media specifically to obtain political information. Much of this model can be applied to the question of youth media choices. Eveland suggests that different gratifications focus attention toward media differently. For example, if there is an entertainment gratification sought, individuals may favor attention to the kind of candidate behavior lampooned on Saturday Night Live or late evening satire shows like the Daily Show and Colbert Report. If an information gratification is sought, individuals may favor attention to differences in candidate positions on major issues.

Given past research indicating that efficacy functions in part based on an individual's level of knowledge (Bandura, 1997), it would be expected that knowledge would have a direct impact on efficacy for young media consumers. Therefore, we predict the following:

$H_1$: Political knowledge will have a strong and direct positive impact on political efficacy.

Furthermore, because knowledge is considered a critical factor in creating political self-efficacy and because media relate variably to knowledge, it should be expected that different media play varying roles in building efficacy through knowledge. Past research has shown that television is a weak predictor of knowledge compared to other media such as newspapers or the Web (Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001). Thus the relationship between media choice, knowledge, and political self-efficacy should vary depending on media.

$H_2$: Time spent with television, because it involves both entertainment and news time, is likely to have a negative impact on both knowledge and through knowledge on efficacy.

*Elaboration*

Eveland also posited that gratifications influence the information processing of political news. Again, those who seek entertainment may spend few cognitive resources on candidate

positions, while those who seek information will elaborate much more on those positions and how they relate to their own values and beliefs.

Eveland & Dunwoody (2001) define cognitive elaboration as connecting separate pieces of information, whether it is from memory or material being processed, into a larger whole that provides a framework for understanding. Elaboration in terms of media use then occurs when information from media in this case is collected by the individual and compared with prior knowledge, allowing the individual to construct new frameworks for understanding the world. Elaboration thus is positively associated with knowledge (Eveland, Shah & Kwak, 2003).

Different media play different roles in elaboration. With the Web, it appears that the benefits that come with rich interconnected information resources benefit frequent users' ability to elaborate on what they are consuming, whereas with less-frequent users the wealth of information might serve to confuse users and thus hinder elaboration (Eveland, Marton & Seo, 2004). Newspapers have been found to be strongly associated with elaboration, and how the media are used also matters, as use for information and surveillance is positively associated with elaboration compared to use for entertainment (Eveland, 2001; Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004). Given these findings, we predict:

$H_3$: Time spent with newspapers will have a positive impact on elaboration and through elaboration on knowledge.

$H_4$: Internet news use will have a positive impact on elaboration and through elaboration on knowledge.

*The Media Choice Model*

A main and persistent criticism of uses and gratifications theory is that, while the theory does explain media choice, it does little to help predict which media a person will choose given a certain set of needs (Ruggiero, 2000). In a related variation of uses and gratifications approaches, the Media Choice Model (Thorson & Duffy, 2006) addresses how people, both adults and teens, choose media. The Media Choice Model suggests that new media features (immediacy, mobility, ease of use, presence of video or audio, dependence on text) influence the way people fill their communication needs and develop preferred patterns of media use but modify those patterns as the media environment changes. It also suggests that voice used in the news is a significant impact on what media people choose to get their news.

Arnett, Larson and Offer (1995) emphasized that adolescent use of media is highly active, as it is perceived to be in uses and gratifications, and seems to follow patterns of human development as teens learn to seek out concepts of self and their place in social contexts. In the introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* the authors overview how important it is to understand youth as being active selectors of media, just as they take an active role in creating and defining many of the relationships in their lives: schools, parents, significant others and so on (e.g., Lerner and Kaufman, 1985; Scarr & McCartney, 1983; Scarr, 1993).

Eveland, McLeod, and Horowitz (1999) review the literature on the relationship between media exposure and political interest, two variables that have reciprocal relations. Nevertheless, the preponderance of findings suggests that the dominant causal direction is from media

exposure to political interest. Although there is not much research to guide the connection to gratifications, it would seem that the motives would be as likely to mediate the effects of media exposure on political interest as suggested for political knowledge.

*Voice*

Thorson and Duffy's (2006) media choice model, which extends uses and gratifications theory to the online environment, identifies several types of news stories from which readers can choose. In their model, these different types are referred to as "voices." Traditional, authoritative news is but one option. People may instead prefer "opinionated" news, from the popular, conservative Fox News Channel to blogs of every type, or "collaborative" news, in which journalists report working closely with their audience or readers as sources to cover a story. Opinionated news may resonate particularly well with younger audiences. A 2005 Carnegie Foundation report claims that young audiences prefer to obtain news from a source whose politics and attitudes are known and made clear to audiences (Brown, 2005). The report points to the high perceived credibility of self-proclaimed "fake news" host Jon Stewart and rapidly increasing use of blogs for "news" among adolescents as signs of the rising popularity of non-traditional opinionated news formats. In a political election, it is also the case that candidates can speak directly to the public through advertising, promotional materials, and all kinds of website content like official campaign sites and blogs. In the advertising literature, when it became legal for pharmaceutical companies to start talking directly to consumers rather than through medical professionals like doctors, the advertising was dubbed "direct-to-consumer" or DTC (e.g., see Calfee, 2002).

A great deal of research has focused on how DTC impacts consumers; two findings from this body of work are particularly salient for this study. First, consumers find the advertising directed towards them quite compelling and convincing and are likely to act on it (e.g., Bell, Cravitz, & Wilkes, 1999; Mehta & Purvis, 2003; Perri & Nelson, 1987; Williams & Hensel, 1995). Second, the information in DTC ads about what each advertised drug does is easily- and well-learned by consumers (Alperstein & Peyrot, 1993; et al., 1998). Given the richness of the research understanding of DTC, it seemed useful to label messages that are delivered directly to the consumer about politicians DTC as well. Thus DTC voice is political voices that consumer receives without the intervention of news filtering.

Given previous research on the impact of authoritative news voice (Thorson, 2005; Coleman & Thorson, 2002), demonstrated impacts of DTC advertising on learning and behavior, and the youth preference for opinionated news, we predict the following effects of news voices:

$H_5$: Authoritative news voice will have a positive impact on both elaboration and knowledge.

$H_6$: DTC voice will have a positive impact on knowledge and perhaps also efficacy.

$H_7$: Opinionated news will have a strong positive impact on knowledge and perhaps also efficacy.

## METHOD

### *Survey data collection*

These survey data were collected from a single panel of respondents in two waves during 2008. The first wave was gathered between May 20 and June 25, 2008 by Synovate, a commercial survey research firm, using a four-page mailed questionnaire. The second wave was gathered from these same respondents between November 5 and December 10, 2008, again using a four-page mailed questionnaire. Synovate employs a stratified quota sampling technique to recruit respondents. Initially, the survey firm acquires contact information for millions of Americans from commercial list brokers, who gather identifying information from drivers' license bureaus, telephone directories, and other centralized sources. Large subsets of these people are contacted via mail and asked to indicate whether they are willing to participate in periodic surveys. Small incentives are offered, such as pre-paid phone cards, for participation.

Rates of agreement vary widely across demographic categories. For example, five to ten percent of middle class recruits typically consent, compared to less than one percent of urban minorities. It is from this pre-recruited group of roughly 500,000 people that demographically balanced samples are constructed for collection. To achieve a representative pool of respondents, stratified quota sampling procedures are employed. That is, the sample is drawn to reflect the properties of the population within each of the nine Census divisions in terms of household income, population density, age, and household size. This starting sample is then adjusted within a range of subcategories that include race, gender, and marital status in order to compensate for expected differences in return rates (see Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005; Shah et al., 2007 for details).

For the purposes of this study, this technique was used to generate a sample of households with children age 12-17. A parent in the selected households was contacted via mail, asked to complete an introduction portion of they survey and then to pass the survey to the 12-17 year old child in the household who most recently celebrated a birthday. This child answered a majority of the survey content and then returned the survey to the parents to complete and return. This sampling method was used to generate the initial sample of 4,000 respondents for the 2002 Life Style Study. Of the 4,000 mail surveys distributed, 1,325 responses were received, which represents a response rate of 33.1% against the mailout. A small number of these responses were omitted due to incomplete or inconsistent information, resulting in a slightly smaller final sample.

As a result, 1,255 questionnaires were mailed out for the second wave on November 4, 2008. Of the recontact surveys distributed, 738 were returned, for a panel retention rate of 55.7% and a response rate against the mailout of 60.4%. Due to some mismatches in the age of the child within the household that completed the second wave of the survey, a small subset of responses were dropped, resulting in smaller final sample of 698 respondents for the 12-17 panel. It is from these panel data that the measures constructed below were developed.

### *Measures and Analyses*

To examine the hypotheses outlined above and investigate the relationship between

media choice, news voices, political knowledge, elaboration, and political efficacy among a sample of teens, this study relied on hierarchical linear regressions. Multiple models combined sets of independent variables to predict knowledge and efficacy. The first model tested demographic variables including age, household size, parent's marital status, years in current residence, and parent's income, as well as political affiliation (Strongly Democrat, Democrat, Independent, Republican, Strong Republican). IS ELABORATION MISSING?

The second hierarchical regression model added media choices, including newspaper, television and Internet use. Exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction with Varimax rotation determined three dimensions of media choice among nine items that respondents rated in terms of their everyday media use. The first factor included three items, "Reading a newspaper for entertainment," "Reading a newspaper to find out what's happening in the world," and "Reading a newspaper to have something to talk about," which were combined to create a newspaper use scale ($\alpha = .908$). SO WE DIDN'T USE THE REGULAR EXPOSURE ITEMS? WHY? Television and Internet use factors included three similar items each, replacing "Reading a newspaper" with "Watching television" and "Using the Internet," respectively. Each trio of items was combined to create scales for TV use ($\alpha = .74$) and Internet use ($\alpha = .80$).

The next model added information voices, specifically authoritative, opinionated, and "direct-to-consumer" voices. Exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction with Varimax rotation determined three profiles of news voice among 13 items that respondents rated in terms of weekly media consumption. The first factor, labeled authoritative voice ($\alpha = .72$), comprised six types of content: print and online versions of national newspapers such as the *New York Times* or *USA Today*, local newspapers, the teen's school student newspaper (print or online), and TV news websites such as cnn.com. Four items loaded onto the second factor, opinionated news voice ($\alpha = .79$): conservative and liberal political blogs, conservative talk ratio, and humorous Internet videos about political candidates such as those from the Daily Show or Saturday Night Live. Finally, three items loaded on a third factor, representing direct-to-consumer, or DTC, voice ($\alpha = .75$): political candidates' websites, ads where presidential candidates attack each other, and ads where candidates give the viewer reasons to vote for them.

The next model added elaboration. This composite variable indicated how much respondents agreed with three statements: "I try to connect what I see in the media to what I already know," "I often recall what I encounter in the media later on and think about it," and "Among my friends, it's important to know what's going on in the world." ($\alpha = .755$).

When predicting political efficacy, an additional model added the teen's political knowledge, measured by a series of six factual questions about the 2008 presidential candidates. Questions addressed candidates' issue stances and background information, and the mean score for this additive scale was 3.80 out of 6 ($s = 1.6$). Political knowledge also functioned as a dependent variable for select analyses, as indicated in the results section. Do we provide the items on the knowledge scale?

The primary dependent variable was political efficacy. This composite variable was computed from five items identified by exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction and Varimax rotation. The items indicated how much respondents agreed with five

statements: "I am influential among my friends," "My friends often seek my opinion about politics," "I am good at persuading people to see things my way," "When I talk about politics I try to convince other people I am right," and "To be a good citizen, you need to stand up for your values" ($\alpha = .712$).

## RESULTS

In all, we examined data from 698 adolescents ages 12-18[1]. Age was distributed fairly evenly, with the exception of the youngest and oldest teen respondents. Approximately 8% were age 12, 16% age 13, 17.5% age 14, 18% age 15, 19.5% age 16, 15% age 17, and 5% age 18. Given the nearly equal distribution of age in the first wave of the survey, small groupings at the age endpoints likely reflect THE AGING PROCESS WITH THE YOUNGEST MOVING INTO THE SECOND CATEGORY, AND THE OLDEST MOVING INTO THE 18 AGE GROUP, WHICH WE DID NOT INCLUDE IN THE ORIGINAL SAMPLE.. The teenagers split somewhat evenly into political party affiliations: 40% identified as democrat, 30% as republican, and 29% as independent.

Income, which was measured as a self-reported, open response, ranged from $31,000 to more than $57,000 with an average of more than $45,000. The mean household size was four people, and families lived in their current homes an average of 11 years, with a range from 0 to 59 years. A large majority of teens (76%) came from families with married parents or domestic partners, while 13% and 3% had divorced or separated parents, respectively, and 6.9% lived with parents who said they were never married. Thus, three-quarters of the teens came from two-parent households. How does this stack up to national figures?

In terms of media use, the adolescents unsurprisingly were heavier consumers of television and Internet media than of newspapers. Comparing the composite media choice variables outline in the Method section, averages were higher for television viewing and Internet use ($M_{television} = 9.29$; $M_{internet} = 9.06$) than for newspaper reading ($M = 5.69$). ALTHOUGH WE SHOULD CHECK THIS BECAUSE I THINK THE MEDIA EXPOSURE MEASURES SHOWED LOW INTERNET USE AND HIGHER NEWSPAPER USE.

The first regression analysis (see *Table 1*) predicted political knowledge from four groups of independent variables, entered hierarchically to compute four regression models: demographics and political affiliation, media choice, information voice, and elaboration, The complete model, which included all predictors, explained 12% of the variance in knowledge. In this full model, only age, parent's income, television viewing (negative), elaboration, and DTC voice directly influenced knowledge. This lends support to $H_2$, which predicted that general television use would directly and negatively impact knowledge. Internet use nearly reached significance in both reduced and complete models, lending partial support to $H_4$. Internet use, like TV viewing, influenced knowledge directly, counter to predictions in $H_4$ that Internet use would operate through elaboration on knowledge. Newspaper use BUT THIS APPARENTLY NEWSPAPER CHOICE, NOT USE? had no discernable relationship with political knowledge among these

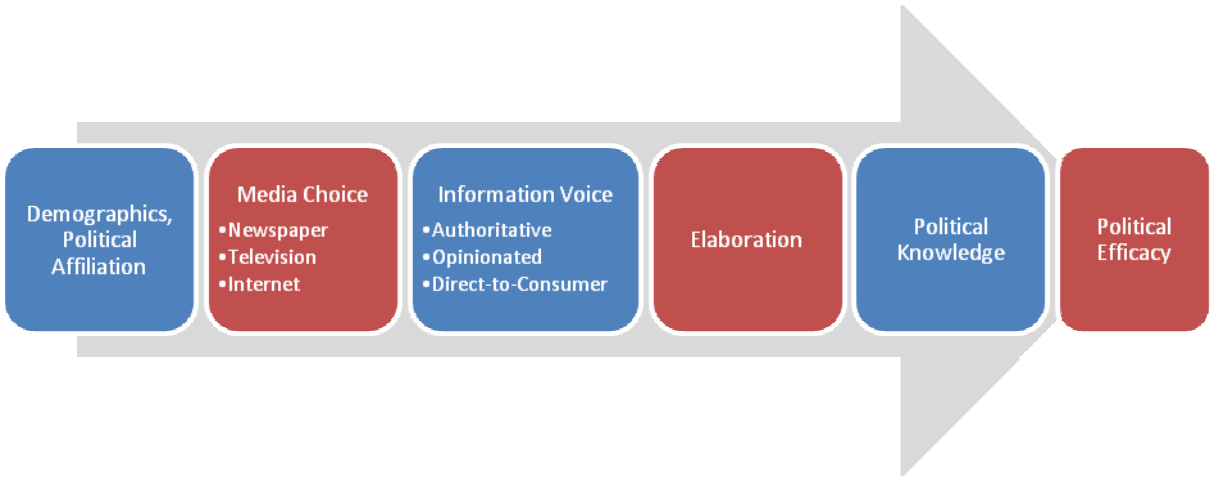
[1] Due to the longitudinal nature of this panel study, a small portion of teen respondents reached their 18th birthday between the first and second waves

teens, contradicting $H_3$. Even the raw correlation between these two variables was not significant ($r$ = -.073, $p$ = .078). Newspaper reading, however, was the sole media choice predictor of elaboration, determined by a hierarchical regression analysis of demographics and political affiliation, media choices and news voices on elaboration (final adjusted $R^2$ = .097). Thus $H_3$, which proposed a positive impact of newspaper use on elaboration, was supported, while $H_2$ and $H_4$, which proposed similar influences of television and Internet use, were not.

Turning to news voices, opinionated and DTC but not authoritative voice predicted elaboration, while only DTC voice was significant in the knowledge model. Thus $H_5$, which predicted a direct influence of authoritative voice on both elaboration and knowledge, was unsupported on both counts. Predictions that DTC voice ($H_6$) would positively impact knowledge were confirmed, but similar expectations for opinionated voice ($H_7$) were not.

The second hierarchical regression analysis (see *Table 2*) predicted political efficacy from five cumulative blocks of predictor variables: demographics and political affiliation, media choice, information voices, elaboration, and political knowledge. The full model explained 41.9% of the variance in efficacy. Significant direct predictors in the complete model included opinionated voice, elaboration, knowledge, and age. This supports $H_1$, which predicted a direct positive impact of knowledge on efficacy, and $H_7$, which predicted a direct effect of opinionated voice on efficacy. $H_6$, which proposed that DTC voice would directly influence efficacy, was not supported. General television use, a significant predictor of political knowledge, failed to reach significance in the efficacy model, indicating that knowledge fully mediates the impact of television viewing on efficacy, as projected in $H_2$. Newspaper use was significant when entering only demographic, political affiliation and media choice variables, but adding elaboration to the model completely mediated the impact of newspaper use on efficacy. General Internet use remained significant after adding elaboration, but only approached significance once knowledge was added to the model, indicating that knowledge but not elaboration mediates the impact of Internet use on efficacy. Elaboration was by far the strongest predictor of efficacy; this full model would significantly explain 10.7% (adjusted $R^2$) of the variance in efficacy without elaboration, compared to 41.9% explained by including elaboration.

To summarize, of the media and voice variables, only opinionated voice had a direct effect on efficacy. All media effects were mediated through either knowledge or elaboration, which were the strongest predictors of efficacy ($H_1$ supported). Television use negatively predicted knowledge and indirectly influenced efficacy through knowledge ($H_2$ supported). Time with newspapers positively predicted elaboration but was not significant for knowledge ($H_3$ partially supported). General Internet use nearly had a direct effect on knowledge but did not predict elaboration ($H_4$ partially supported). When looking specifically at the effects on efficacy, newspaper and Internet choice were mediated by opinionated and DTC voice. Authoritative voice was not significantly associated with knowledge or elaboration ($H_5$ not supported). DTC voice positively predicted knowledge and indirectly influenced efficacy through elaboration ($H_6$ supported). Opinionated voice directly predicted efficacy but not knowledge ($H_7$ partially supported). Given these findings, we predict the following conceptual model (Figure 1).




## DISCUSSION

This study extends our understanding of adolescents' political socialization by introducing the concept of information "voice" as a driver of political knowledge and efficacy. Previous research (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Thorson, 2006) has identified links between media use (including news use, specifically), knowledge, and efficacy. This investigation approached media influence from two dimensions drawn from the Media Choice Model (Thorson & Duffy, 2006): media choice, including general newspaper, television, and Internet use; and voice, including authoritative, opinionated, and direct-to-consumer (DTC) voices.

Regression analyses with data from a nationwide survey of nearly 700 teenagers indicate that the style, or voice, in which media deliver their content may directly impact how much their adolescent audiences learn about politics and how much they feel empowered to act on that knowledge. Opinionated information voice, such as that heard on conservative or liberal blogs, directly and positively predicted political efficacy. The direct-to-consumer voice, such as ads where political candidates address their audience, directly and positively predicted political knowledge.

While media choice and voice contributed to the variance in efficacy, elaboration and knowledge remained the strongest predictors in the complete model (see *Table 2*). This aligns with previous findings linking elaboration to knowledge and knowledge to efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Staples, Hulland, & Higgin, 1998; Meraz, 2006). Including elaboration in the efficacy model nearly quadrupled the amount of variance explained. This strong, direct effect of elaboration on efficacy is unsurprising given that elaboration, or thinking about the information one encounters, should lead to greater knowledge, which theory links closely with efficacy.

The results of this research present an opportunity to build theory as it relates to uses and gratifications and media choice. In the context of media use and political engagement, which is the natural outgrowth of political self-efficacy, scholars have posited that certain media choices such as television are tools of lowering of political self-efficacy (Putnam, 1993). Critics have responded that the reasons for use, such as information versus entertainment, have more to do with engagement than the medium itself (Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001). The new findings from this research demonstrate that the manner in which the content is presented (opinionated vs.

authoritative, for example) also matters when it comes to building self-efficacy in adolescent users. Our results indicate that the voice component of the Media Choice Model is a justified approach to examining media effects in political socialization. In particular, opinionated and direct-to-consumer (DTC) information voice resonated with young media consumers and seemed to do the most, of all media variables, of creating knowledge and a sense of empowerment that leads towards action, compared to an authoritative voice.

While the results of this study represent an early attempt to build this area of theory in U&G, we found direct links to knowledge and efficacy from two of the three voices proposed. Specifically, opinionated voice predicted efficacy, and DTC predicted knowledge. The direct influence of opinionated media content on teens' efficacy, combined with previous research noting youth preference for opinionated news and information such as blogs and the Daily Show (Brown, 2005), suggests a trend among younger audiences away from traditional, authoritative information toward a format where opinions are encouraged. Not only do adolescents appear to prefer this content, they appear to gain a sense of empowerment from it as well.

The direct influence of DTC media content on teens' political knowledge indicates that teenagers are listening when political candidates speak directly to them. This finding mimics extensive research demonstrating the effectiveness of DTC pharmaceutical advertising in terms of audience learning and action (e.g. Mehta & Purvis, 2003; Peyrot et al., 1998), but extends the concept of DTC voice to political communication as well. Just as pharmaceutical companies have met success by speaking directly to their consumers, it appears that politicians are similarly educating future voters by speaking directly to their audiences.

From a practical standpoint, the findings in this study seem to confirm, albeit in a different way, some of the implications found in research related to public journalism. Researchers have long noted the heavy use of conflict and horse-race frames in covering politics (McCombs & Shaw, 1974). Public journalism advocates have argued journalism has not been structured in a way that helps citizens make decisions necessary in self-governing societies such as democracy (Rosen & Merritt, 1994). By presenting the news in the form of "he said, she said" conflict frames, the news focuses only on who is arguing, debating, or disagreeing and thus doesn't provide the sense-making tools for citizens to decide who should win those arguments or debates. In addition, the heavy focus on horse race frames for news, which emphasizes which candidate is winning or prevailing rather than why their ideas should be prevailing, turns politics into competition rather than something that can provide solutions for the citizenry (Lambeth, Meyer & Thorson, 1998; Pointdexter & McCombs, 2001). In short, public journalism advocates argue these forms of news presentation actually erode trust in government and a news consumer's sense they can change their community or nation by participation, and this is the heart of political self-efficacy.

The findings from this study suggest something similar. Authoritative news sources, which "tell" the user what the news is without analysis that allows the user to come to a solution, might inform younger users but does little to spur the necessary thought processes needed to turn knowledge into action by way of efficacy. On the other hand, material that critics might call "biased" because it is opinionated or comes directly from a candidate provides adolescent users with more than mere information. The results from our model indicate, with relation to internet or newspaper use, that this type of news presentation is related to the adolescent user's ability to

take that knowledge and feel confident enough in their grasp of the issue that they feel able to act on it or try to convince others of what they know. Recall that this sense of political self-efficacy is highly related to whether or not a young person votes in an election. It appears that news and information voice that offers opinion and analysis does more to create the self-efficacy needed for these pro-social behaviors than does the traditional authoritative style of information dissemination.

In addition to implications that involve engaging young audiences in ways that promote civic behaviors, another practical implication of this research is that it provides some clues as to how news content can be structured in ways that reach younger readers. Recall that past research has demonstrated young users' appetite for news and information presented in a way that show opinion and bias so that the information is known (Brown, 2005). Given that news producers, particularly newspapers, have been unsuccessful in attracting young users to their product, it would seem that news messages that contain more opinion and analysis, and perhaps even unfiltered content directly from candidates, might be beneficial to content producers as they try to attract adolescent consumers.

As with any research, this study has limitations. The sample used here involved adolescent media users, and while there are good theoretical reasons to think that the results here would be similar to that found in adults, it is possible that the results might be different. Perhaps adolescents typically are at a stage of development where they rely more on opinions of others than adults when it comes to understanding and acting on what they know of the world around them. Future research could go beyond mere age differences and explore stages of cognitive development as another variable in the model we have described here.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Hierarchical regression predicting teen respondents' political knowledge *(N = 698)*

| | **Model 1** *Demographics* | | | **Model 2** *Media Choice* | | | **Model 3** *Information Voice* | | | **Model 4** *Elaboration* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β |
| Age | .113 | .040 | .119** | .113 | .041 | .119** | .12 | .041 | .127** | .11 | .041 | .117** |
| Political affiliation | .007 | .067 | .004 | -.019 | .067 | -.013 | -.024 | .067 | -.016 | -.037 | .067 | -.025 |
| Household size | .014 | .054 | .012 | .016 | .054 | .013 | .015 | .054 | .013 | .005 | .053 | .004 |
| Parents' marital status | .121 | .057 | .108* | .120 | .057 | .108* | .127 | .057 | .114* | .101 | .057 | .090 |
| Years in current residence | .008 | .009 | .041* | .011 | .009 | .051 | .01 | .009 | .051 | .011 | .009 | .055 |
| Parents' income | .081 | .013 | .302** | .077 | .013 | .288** | .078 | .013 | .291 | .074 | .013 | .275 |
| TV use | | | | -.049 | .025 | -.110* | -.057 | .025 | -.127* | -.052 | .024 | -.116* |
| Newspaper use | | | | -.015 | .024 | -.032 | -.004 | .027 | -.009 | -.014 | .027 | -.030 |
| Internet use | | | | .030 | .017 | .086 | .03 | .017 | .087 | .032 | .017 | .093 |
| News voice: Authoritative | | | | | | | -.024 | .017 | -.082 | -.028 | .017 | -.096 |
| News voice: Opinionated | | | | | | | .005 | .018 | .016 | .000 | .018 | .001 |
| News voice: DTC | | | | | | | .045 | .018 | .114* | .037 | .018 | .093* |
| Elaboration | | | | | | | | . | | .293 | .087 | .149** |
| $R^2$ | 0.094 | | | 0.107 | | | 0.122 | | | .142 | | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.083 | | | 0.091 | | | 0.101 | | | .119 | | |
| F for $R^2$ change | 8.751 ($p$ = .000) | | | 2.44 ($p$ = .064) | | | 2.859 ($p$ = .037) | | | 11.187 ($p$ = .001) | | |

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

Table 2. Hierarchical regression analysis predicting teen respondents' political efficacy *(N = 698)*

| | **Model 1** *Demographics* | | | **Model 2** *Media Choice* | | | **Model 3** *Info Voice* | | | **Model 4** *Elaboration* | | | **Model 5** *Pol. Knowledge* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β | b | $se_b$ | β |
| Age | -.02 | .11 | -.01 | -.07 | .10 | -.03 | -.06 | .10 | -.03 | -.16 | .08 | -.07* | -.19 | .08 | -.08* |
| Political affiliation | .04 | .17 | .01 | .10 | .17 | .03 | .15 | .17 | .04 | .02 | .13 | .01 | .03 | .13 | .01 |
| Household size | .34 | .14 | .12* | .28 | .14 | .010* | .27 | .14 | .09 | .16 | .11 | .05 | .16 | .11 | .05 |
| Parents' marital status | .39 | .15 | .14** | .35 | .15 | .13** | .31 | .14 | .11* | .04 | .12 | .02 | .02 | .12 | .01 |
| Years in current residence | .02 | .02 | .03 | .01 | .02 | .02 | .01 | .02 | .01 | .01 | .02 | .02 | .01 | .02 | .02 |
| Parents' income | .07 | .03 | .10* | .08 | .03 | .13* | .07 | .03 | .10* | .02 | .03 | .04 | .01 | .03 | .01 |
| TV use | | | | -.01 | .06 | -.01 | -.03 | .06 | -.03 | .02 | .05 | .02 | .03 | .05 | .03 |
| Newspaper use | | | | .18 | .06 | .15** | .10 | .07 | .09 | .00 | .06 | .00 | .00 | .06 | .00 |
| Internet use | | | | .08 | .04 | .10 | .05 | .04 | .06 | .07 | .04 | .08* | .06 | .04 | .07 |
| News voice: Authoritative | | | | | | | .00 | .04 | -.01 | -.04 | .03 | -.06 | -.04 | .03 | -.05 |
| News voice: Opinionated | | | | | | | .14 | .05 | .17** | .08 | .04 | .10* | .08 | .04 | .10* |
| News voice: DTC | | | | | | | .11 | .05 | .11* | .03 | .04 | .03 | .02 | .04 | .02 |
| Elaboration | | | | | | | | | | 2.95 | .18 | .61** | 2.89 | .18 | .60** |
| Political knowledge | | | | | | | | | | | | | .22 | .09 | .09* |
| $R^2$ | 0.025 | | | 0.062 | | | 0.103 | | | 0.429 | | | 0.436 | | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.013 | | | 0.045 | | | 0.081 | | | 0.414 | | | 0.419 | | |
| F for $R^2$ change | 2.089 (*p* = .053) | | | 6.515 (*p* = .000) | | | 7.522 (*p* = .000) | | | 279.516 (*p* = .000) | | | 5.85 (*p* = .016) | | |

**p < .05*
***p < .01*